

attacks on their towns and villages, the French were placed in a new predicament by the invasion, and tens of thousands of French civilians have already lost their lives in the course of the battles.

An interesting factor is the cool reception accorded in Moscow to the news from the invasion front. The Soviets have been waiting so long for the invasion that they can no longer work up much enthusiasm over it.

## THE WINTER WAR IN THE EAST

*November 1, 1943, to April 15, 1944*

*In the December 1943 issue we gave an account of the summer campaign of 1943 carrying the story up to November 1. The following analysis is a very brief one, as the winter war was conducted along principles similar to those discussed in connection with the summer campaign.*

### THE PLANS

**A**FTER Stalingrad, the German High Command saw quite clearly that under the prevailing circumstances a further offensive into the depths of the USSR could not be expected to bring about decisive results. It decided to withdraw its armies far back toward the west, nearer to its bases and system of communications, and thus to economize in men and material in view of the expected demand for German troops in other parts of the Continent. This withdrawal, however, was to be carried out in constant combat with the Red armies, inflicting on them as large losses as possible. Moreover, it did not mean that the Germans have abandoned the idea of offensives, but merely that they are waiting for the opportune time and place for them. This is the strategy the German High Command had successfully employed during the summer campaign of 1943, and it planned to adhere to it in the course of the winter too.

The Soviet High Command, on the other hand, was in a different position. By exerting frontal pressure over a very extended front, from Velikiye Luki to the Sea of Azov, it had been able to gain much ground during the summer but had not succeeded in destroying German manpower to any noteworthy extent. Even according to their own figures, the Soviets had, in the period from July 5 to November 5, 1943, captured only an average of 790 men a day, of whom more than half were wounded. But now the winter, always the most favorable season for Russian armies, was approaching, and the Kremlin apparently laid its plan along a new line. This plan has been made evident by the course of events since November 3, and it consisted of this: while a certain

amount of pressure all along the front was to prevent the Germans from denuding some parts of the front in favor of others, the real attack was to be made by the First Ukrainian Army under General Vatutin in the Kiev area. The overwhelmingly superior quantities of men and material assembled here were to push westward and then to wheel around toward the south in order to cut off and annihilate the German armies in the Dniepr bend.

In a way, the Soviets tried to repeat their Stalingrad maneuver. Again the Germans were standing in a triangle pointing eastward. In the winter of 1942/43 this triangle followed the bend of the Don and had its apex at Stalingrad. In the autumn of 1943 the triangle followed the banks of the Dniepr and had its point in the easternmost corner of this river's bend. In the case of Stalingrad the Russian success was brought about by the breakthrough at Bogutchar, whence the triangle was cut off at its narrow base, and a subsidiary breakthrough at Serafimovich, halfway between Bogutchar and Stalingrad. (See our article "The Winter War," May 1943.) The plans in the autumn of 1943 called for similar breakthroughs in the left flank of the southern German armies, preceded by a push toward the west with the purpose of enlarging the area and number of troops to be cut off.

### SOVIET OPERATIONS

On November 3 the Red offensive in the Kiev area began. It made rapid headway in the direction of Jitomir, which was evacuated by the Germans ten days later. But while the Soviets were celebrating a great victory and the collapse of the German front, they were hit by Field Marshal Manstein in the left flank of their wedge

with such force that they reeled back half-way to Kiev. The first attempt of the Soviets to execute their plan had miscarried.

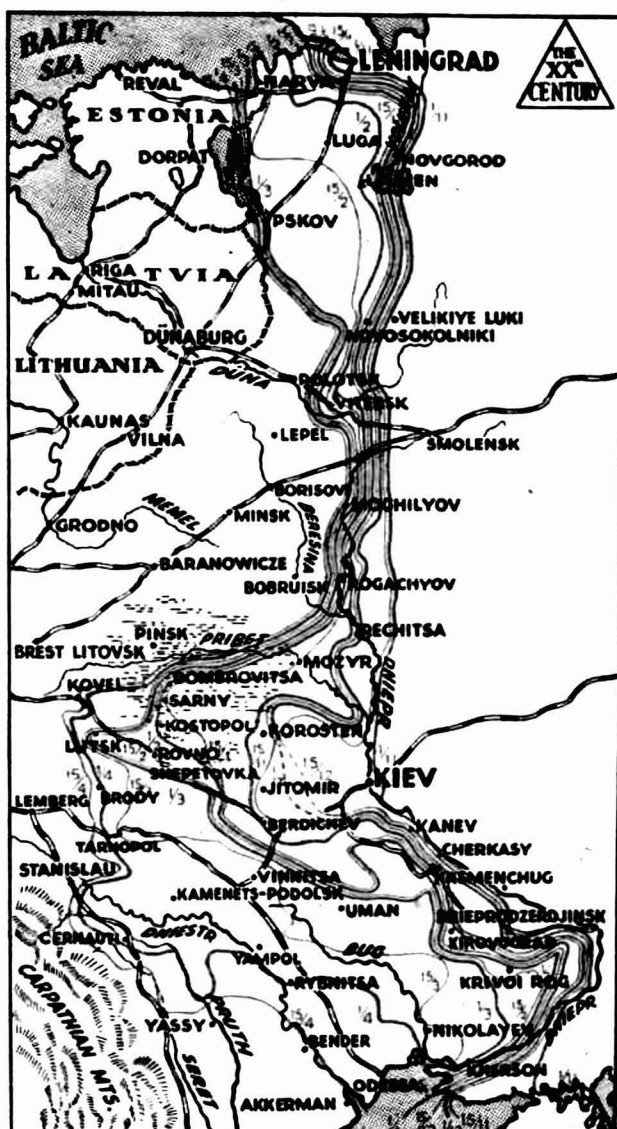
It was only toward the end of December that the Soviets were ready for their second try. On January 2, Jitomir was once more evacuated by the Germans. Again the Soviet thrust moved at a rapid initial speed, reaching the line Sarny/Kostopol by the middle of January. At the same time they made their first subsidiary push toward the south, in the direction of Uman. But while the German armies had allowed them to move quite far westward, they offered determined and successful resistance to this thrust toward the south. The troops to do this were mainly the ten divisions of General Stemmermann, which occupied a wide square from the Dniepr (between Kanev and Cherkasy) westward.

In the meantime, the armies of General Konev had extended the bridgehead established in October west of the Dniepr between Kremenchug and Dnieprodzerdjinsk, and on January 28 a junction was brought about between Vatutin's and Konev's armies to the rear of General Stemmermann. But, in the first place, by their presence and power his forces interfered considerably with the movements of the two Soviet armies; in the second, they succeeded on February 18, after suffering relatively small losses, in breaking through to the main German lines; and in the third, their efforts had shown results. The southward push of Vatutin's left wing toward Uman had been stopped. This can be seen clearly on our map. Where the red lines, based on the Soviet war communiqués, are far apart, the Soviet advance was rapid; wherever they run close to each other the Soviets were halted for a considerable time.

Early in February, Vatutin's armies resumed their westward push. It carried them further into Poland. Rovno and Lutsk were evacuated by the Germans on February 3. The world waited for the Soviets' next move. Theoretically they had the choice of

pushing either west in the direction of Lemberg, i.e., along the northern slopes of the Carpathians, or southwest toward the Carpathian passes, or south down the Pruth and Dniestr valleys toward the Black Sea. Whatever their original intention, our map makes it clear that toward the west they got stuck first on the line Sarny/Lutsk/Rovno/Shepetovka and then on the line Kovel/Brody/Tarnopol.

The Reds now threw the weight of their forces toward the south to cut off the Ger-



The winter war from November 1, 1943, to April 15, 1944. The approximate course of the front on the first of each month is shown by a thick red line, on the 15th of each month by a thin red line. Broken red lines west of Kiev indicate temporary Soviet retreats.

man triangle which still had its easternmost point at Kherson. Our map shows that between March 1 and April 15 the Reds were able to gain considerable ground, but nowhere did they succeed in breaking through. The thin chain of the German-Rumanian troops gave way, bent, and stretched, but never broke. Moreover, it withdrew to the south sufficiently slowly for the rest of the German-Rumanian forces to evacuate from Kherson and the Bug valley. In the end, the front ran almost from east to west, and the German southern armies were separated by 300 kilometers (Yassy/Stanslau) from the German divisions on the central front. But between the German armies on the central and on the southern front, there was no gap through which the Red forces could have advanced into Europe: there was the mighty wall of the Carpathians with its few, well-defended passes. Behind this wall, the lines of communication between Germany and the southern armies remained intact.

By the middle of April the real winter campaign had come to a close. The Reds still made a number of attempts to push the German-Rumanian forces further back, but not with full force and without success.

On the other sections of the Eastern Front, particularly in the area of Vitebsk and Moghilyov, the cornerstones of the German central front, Soviet attacks were frequently reported during the winter and spring but, as our map shows, the front did not witness any changes in this sector. Ever since the middle of January, the front ran from Dombrovitsa via Moghilyov/Vitebsk to Novosokolniki. It was only in the Novosokolniki/Leningrad sector that the front line moved. On January 14 the Red armies had begun large-scale operations in this sector, the purpose of which was to cut off and destroy the left wing of the German front and perhaps to break through to the Baltic. Again the Soviets started with considerable initial success; but they were soon stopped, and the war settled down on the line Narva/Laké Peipus/Pskov/Novosokolniki.

At the extreme other end of the front, in the Crimea, the Soviets had been attacking the small isolated German-Rumanian force ever since November 1 with more than thirty divisions. But it was only on May 13 that the last German troops evacuated the peninsula.

#### THE BALANCE

The Soviets had conquered a large area which had formerly been the agricultural and industrial center of the USSR. But they found these territories terribly mutilated by the war and almost depopulated, the inhabitants having left the country in endless columns before the Red flood.

Nevertheless, on the map the Soviet gains remain most impressive, and they were utilized—although without success—for the "war of nerves" against Finland and the Balkan nations. But if they were frank, the Soviet leaders had to admit that the chief aim toward which they had striven so tenaciously—the envelopment and destruction of the German southern armies—had not been achieved. The Soviets had spent the entire winter in a series of attempts in this direction. They had thrown enormous quantities of men and equipment—particularly of artillery, which has become their main weapon of late—against the thin German-Rumanian front, and they had sacrificed untold numbers of their soldiers in attempted breakthroughs. (On June 26, 1944, Berlin announced the total Soviet losses during the first three years of the war to have been 6,650,000 prisoners, about 12,700,000 killed, 93,420 tanks, 88,646 guns, and 57,954 planes.) But, although many circumstances had favored them and various opportunities had appeared most promising, they did not succeed. Thanks to the huge numerical superiority of their armies, the Soviet generals were able to steamroll forward over wide areas, but they were not able to execute successful large-scale maneuvers. Stalingrad was the sole exception.

The German High Command has accomplished what it set out to do. Not for a moment did it abandon its principle of preserving, at the price of territory, its armed forces, in order to save them up for an opportune moment. It was not easy for the German leaders to sacrifice wide areas of great economic, political, and military significance. The decision to do this after Stalingrad was one of the most difficult and at the same time most far-reaching decisions ever made by an army command. The German people accepted this decision with calm determination, realizing that, in view of the circumstances obtaining on the other frontiers of Europe, this was the best way to carry on the war in the East.